

Cable  
Text:

UNCLAS SENSITIVE ADANA 00012

SIPDIS

CX:

ACTION: POL

INFO: TSR RAO PMA ECON FCS PA DCM MGT DAO AMB CONS

DISSEMINATION: POL /1

CHARGE: PROG

VZCZCAY0793

RR RUEHAK

DE RUEHDA #0012/01 0860842

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 260842Z MAR 08

FM AMCONSUL ADANA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4645

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1187

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1016

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1248

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ADANA 000012

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PTER TU IZ

SUBJECT: NEVRUZ 2008: BIG TURNOUT, ISOLATED VIOLENCE

Summary and Comment

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**¶1.** (SBU) The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) regards the large turnout as proof of its growing popularity - and sympathy for the PKK, which has been under attack from the Turkish military. Violence erupted in a number of cities where the authorities refused to grant permission for celebrations. In Van, one protester was killed and over 150 injured in clashes with the police. While it is unlikely that either the government or the DTP wanted Nevruz marred by violence, the lack of trust between the two parties resulted in poor coordination and the misguided attempt to cancel celebrations in a number of cities produced chaos that is being exploited by pro-PKK militants. In the cities where celebrations were allowed to proceed as the organizers planned, violence and property damage were avoided. Contrary to the hopes of some DTPers, Nevruz 2008 is not a foundation on which to build political progress on the Kurdish issue in coming months. End summary and comment.

Spring Fling

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**¶2.** (SBU) Nevruz, which takes place on the spring equinox, March 21, is the traditional Kurdish new year's celebration, though the holiday's origins stretch back to ancient the Persian and Zoroastrian cultures. Its Zoroastrian roots are reflected in its rituals, which include jumping over fires and dancing to traditional music. The GOT banned Nevruz altogether until the 1990s and it now tolerates celebrations, but there is frequent tension as the militant Kurds often use the holiday as a platform to display support for the PKK and its imprisoned

leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

DTP: We're Getting Stronger

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**¶3.** (SBU) At least a half-million Kurds nation-wide participated in Nevruz celebrations during the last several days. DTP officials claim that about twice as many people turned out for celebrations this year compared with 2007. They cite a number of factors for increased activism. The recent ground operation - and the widespread perception in the southeast that the PKK had successfully repulsed the Turkish offensive - fueled enthusiasm for the holiday among militant nationalists. DTP leaders also claim that they are receiving increased support in the southeast at the expense of the AKP, which is less popular now due to its support for the anti-PKK operations in Northern Iraq.

**¶4.** (SBU) In Diyarbakir, the DTP and the governor's office initially disagreed about the venue for the event, but an agreement was reached and the DTP provided about 5,000 volunteers to help with security. About 350,000 people joined the celebration and despite a lot of pro-PKK, pro-Ocalan chanting and displays, there were no serious clashes with the police and only a few arrests. While the DTP is touting the large turnout as a measure of partisan support, a journalist who attended said that about 30% of those participating were there to celebrate their Kurdish heritage and enjoy the music rather than as a political statement.

Lack of Agreement Results in Violence

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**¶5.** (SBU) In Van, the organizers applied to hold the celebration on March 22, so that participants would not have to miss work to attend. Despite submitting their application 20 days prior to the event, the governor's office responded on March 20 that the celebration could only be held on the 21st. On the 22nd, about 1,500 protesters converged on the DTP offices to express opposition to the governor's decision. According to local contacts, the police warned the crowd to disperse and then violence broke out, with protesters throwing stones and the police using firearms. A total of 155 people were injured and one protester was killed. The following day, about 10,000 protesters turned out to mourn the man who was killed, leading to additional confrontations with the police. Local contacts, including the Bar Association president and members of HakPar, a Kurdish party, told us the violence would not have erupted if the governor's office had allowed the celebrations to proceed as proposed. The governor, according to one contact, deliberately delayed the decision in order to put the organizers in a difficult position.

**¶6.** (U) In Yuksekova, in the far southeastern corner of Turkey near the Iranian border, the authorities also refused permission for a weekend celebration, triggering the same reaction, which has led to one death and four days of violent protests.

Politics, Conspiracy Theories, Harassment

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**¶7.** (SBU) In a sign of posturing in advance of the 2009 municipal elections, the DTP is blaming the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), its principal rival for votes in the southeast, of sanctioning the attempts to ban the holiday in certain cities and the subsequent violence. One DTP statement accused PM Erdogan of trying to buy off Turkey's Kurds with a "box of candies", i.e. the much-discussed economic package for southeastern Turkey. And a DTP contact in Diyarbakir told us that elements of the state wanted violence to spread the myth that all Kurds are violent terrorists.

**¶8.** (SBU) Not unusually, the government also found petty ways to disrupt the celebrations. The government barred the DTP from displaying posters with its new slogan "Enough is enough" (referring to continued violence). The authorities originally forbade the party from displaying the slogan in Kurdish, so the organizers printed it in Zaza (another Kurdish dialect), Spanish and English, but the court banned that poster as well. In

Adana, the DTP relied on open-air trucks to transport many of its supporters in from the rural areas to participate. Despite Turkey's notoriously blasphemous attention to traffic safety, the police fined all those riding on the trucks, mostly poor migrant families, about \$1.30 per person for violating the rules. In Diyarbakir, Turkish Air Force F-16s and helicopters buzzed the crowd repeatedly.

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